

Heart and Soul by Kamije Celeek

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Drama, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Eleven/Jane H., Mike W.

Status: Completed

Published: 2019-03-01 21:40:54

Updated: 2019-03-01 21:40:54

Packaged: 2019-12-12 20:19:57

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 7,228

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Love is a fickle thing, particularly when one is a god of love. But when god of love Mike meets the mortal princess Eleven, they learn what it means to fall in love... and even more so what it means to lose someone you love, and what you're willing to do to keep them by your side. Based on the myth of Eros and Psyche.

Heart and Soul

Because Greek mythology is my favorite thing.

Special thanks to FateChica for being my idea-bouncer when figuring out the mythical couple and our 'antagonist'! Check out her stuff; seriously, I think she's starting to influence my writing a bit with how good hers is.

The kingdom of Mirkwood was known for three things: wealth, prosperity, and its princess.

Princess Eleven was called as such because she was the eleventh child of King Brenner, a man who'd adopted ten others before her. But she was known above her siblings because she was beautiful. Hers was the kind of beauty most men longed to possess, and Brenner intended to use his daughter to his advantage. It was only a matter of time before marriage offers to extend his kingdom rolled in.

There was a curious thing about Eleven, however; rather than admiring her beauty as simply human and offering marriage alliances through her, people said she was a goddess, the goddess of beauty given human form and living among the mortals. And Brenner relished in this fact, because it gave him opportunity to marry off his other children in those alliances that he'd hoped to use Eleven to cultivate. He grew richer and his people more gluttonous and right there in the middle of it all was Princess Eleven.

She was not a proud girl. Eleven was quiet and humble, never wanting to be the center of attention but her beauty not allowing her to stay out of the spotlight. She longed to be normal, to look like anybody else, to not have comparisons made to the goddess known as Karen. Because Karen was a vengeful goddess when it came down to it and it was dangerous to anger her. These comparisons would anger the goddess above all else and she'd punish anybody she could for doing anything of the sort.

And, as it turned out, Eleven was right...

"MICHAEL!"

Mike cringed at the sound of his mother's shrieking. He'd had a long night performing his duties as the god of love, and he was *not* in the mood to cater to her demands.

"MICHAEL, YOU GET IN HERE, NOW!"

He got out of bed and traipsed down the hall to find Karen up in arms. She was furiously pacing back and forth, anger flaring and making the fire her offerings came out of flare in tandem with her emotional state.

"What's wrong?" he yawned.

"How about the fact that I haven't gotten a single offering in *months*?!" she snapped. His eyes widened.

"The hell?!"

"It's because of this princess from Mirkwood named Eleven. They've started worshipping *her*, saying that she's a goddess and that she's more beautiful than *me*."

"Okay, what? There's no way that's true."

"Then explain the lack of sacrifices."

"Mom..." Mike failed to come up with an argument that would satisfy his mother, the goddess of love, beauty, and family. He didn't think any of it went hand in hand, but he also knew that his mother wouldn't rest until this matter was resolved. "What do you want me to do about it?"

"Simple. You go down to Mirkwood and make her fall in love with the most hideous creature you can find. That ought to show Her Majesty that she's not a goddess."

"Mom, I don't think it's the girl's fault—"

"Do *not* argue with me, Michael. You're the god of love, this is your job. Do your job and don't argue."

Mike was tempted to fight back, but in all honesty, he knew what this was really about. His mother had a constant fear of being replaced, and that fear drove her to unimaginable lengths. And he knew that was why she was so concerned with this princess—not because the princess was beautiful, but because of the fact that mortals were worshipping her instead of Karen, therefore replacing her.

And he was a loyal son. It was one of his marks as a god of love—not lust, but love. The kind of love that drove people to stay with one person forever, the kind of love that joined people in marriage. Ironic, given that Mike himself was unmarried and he had no intention of going down that path anytime soon. Karen's marriage to Ted, a god whose only worship was as her husband and the father of Mike, Nancy (the protector goddess of young women and queen of the underworld), and Holly (the goddess of youth), had not inspired Mike to seek a match.

"Okay, Mom. I'll do my job."

"Good boy. And, while you're at it, figure out an accident for her father, would you? Horrible man."

Mike rolled his eyes and headed out, his wings sprouting as he leapt from the window and towards the mortal realm. He flew over the farms and towns where he was worshipped, where the mortals begged him and the other gods for protection, where he'd seen so many of them fall apart because of war or inadvertently offending a god. Mirkwood was headed down that path because of Princess Eleven, and he wondered if her father had any remorse for his people or the hell that the kingdom would endure because of the princess.

By the time he arrived at the palace, it was night. He was invisible as he stalked through the shockingly-empty palace. A young woman slept with her husband—Princess Katherine, he assumed—and he came to a room where King Brenner himself was having a discussion with his advisors. The older man was gaunt, his hair strikingly white and the look of greed on his face made Mike want to punch him.

"Once Kali is married off, Princess Eleven will be the last one," he told his advisor. "Now, I don't know about you, but I don't particularly

feel like handing my kingdom over to some young prince. Perhaps someone who knows the kingdom... better."

"I'd be honored, sire."

I don't need to make her fall in love with a monster; she already lives with one.

He continued through the halls and found a young boy praying at an altar to Nancy. Out of curiosity, he crept closer to listen.

"...and Ellie? She's a *really* good person. I want you to protect her because Papa won't, he just wants her to be a trophy for the kingdom. It's just me and Kali and Kat who care about her, and she's sad all the time, and everyone says she's prettier than your mom, but Ellie doesn't think she is and she's telling everyone to cut it out but they won't listen..."

Mike felt his breath hitch slightly.

She doesn't think she's prettier than Mom. She's trying to stop people from saying that.

Shit. Shit shit shit.

Finally, he came across a room with the number 11 above the door. Taking a deep breath, he entered and let his godly light illuminate his target...

And that was it.

One look at her beautiful face and Mike had fallen head-over-heels in love with her. She was unlike any goddess he'd ever seen and knowing—*knowing*—that she was humble enough to not accept the worship being laid on her made her that much more attractive. Mike reached out a hand and tucked a piece of hair behind her ear. Eleven inhaled sharply and her eyes fluttered open, a caramel-brown color that made him melt.

You are screwed.

"Is someone there?" she whispered.

Oh, her voice...

It was sweet, almost musical, and clear as a bell. Mike just wanted to listen to her for hours, but he had a job to do. His mother kept count of his arrows, and one had to be expelled by the end of the night. He took one out and willed Eleven to go back to sleep so she wouldn't hear him. She settled down and those eyes closed and Mike pricked his finger on the arrow.

He'd never felt the magic that made his arrows so powerful before, and now he could understand why humans would go so far to protect loved ones. All he wanted to do now was scoop her up and take her back to Hawkins, the home of the gods, and let her live out her days in safety and happiness. But he had to be smart about this. If he just took her now, there would be serious repercussions from Karen. She was the one being Mike couldn't protect Eleven from. And he wanted to protect her—he'd give up his godhood if it meant she was safe.

And he began to plan...

"Eleven, fantastic news."

The princess of Mirkwood looked up at her father, eyes blank.

"Yes, Papa?"

"I have found you a match. You'll be marrying one of my advisors—Vincent."

In her gut, Eleven felt a swirling ball of fear, apprehension, and disgust. Vincent was one of her father's advisors—one who was known for his less-than-courteous treatment of women. But he was also the man her father leaned on for advice and if Vincent wanted something, he'd get it. Even if it was his boss's youngest daughter, the one who was a *trophy* for the kingdom of Mirkwood.

"Don't make Ellie marry Vincent," begged Kat, Eleven's eldest sister and the one who would be passed over in favor of the youngest. "He's... he's not right for her. He'll treat her horribly."

"But he's wealthy, and he'll add his lands to our kingdom."

Kat looked sick to her stomach and Oliver—their only brother still living with them—bit his lip. He was only eight, but he'd seen everything his sisters had, everything that their father did 'for the good of the kingdom', and he was so big-hearted that it hurt to watch his older siblings bartered away for land, for riches, for prestige, and knowing that Eleven would soon be in that camp... it hurt him deeply. She could tell and she wanted to cradle him in her arms, to reassure him, but she needed somebody to do that for her first. She was trapped and she'd be stuck in a loveless marriage to a man who treated her like nothing more than an object of lust.

"I just wanted to let you know, Eleven. Good day."

Brenner left and Eleven buried her face in her arms.

"I've been praying to Nancy," mumbled Oliver. "I asked her to watch over you."

"The gods aren't going to help Ellie," croaked Kat, tears in her eyes. Her husband, Steve, set a hand on her shoulder. "If they wanted to help, they'd take her away and kill Papa."

"Look, we'll figure something out," Steve assured the two sisters. "I'm not letting anything bad happen to you guys."

"I have a solution," suggested Hopper, one of the guards who'd been like a father to Eleven. "Why not take Ellie to see the Oracle—ask *her* what's in Ellie's future? She'll know."

"I'll go with her," Kat agreed, wiping her eyes.

The two sisters set out for the home of the Oracle that day, insisting that it was for the good of their kingdom. Brenner let them go, wanting to know what the Oracle would say. And arriving at the Oracle, giving the woman their offering, Eleven felt a sense of fear and dread.

"El."

The woman's voice had a hiss to it.

"You will find a husband, a great and powerful one, but he will be a

monster that even the gods of Hawkins fear. But with him, you will find happiness and your destiny."

"How do I find him?" Eleven asked.

"Go to the forest and wait by the quarry cliffs."

The woman blinked and her eyes cleared as she smiled.

"Thank you for your offering. Will thanks you for your patronage."

I'm going to marry a monster.

The thought was almost too much for Eleven as she stumbled out of the Oracle's chamber and haphazardly relayed the message to her sister. Kat's expression was one of sadness and worry, but also of relief because her sister wouldn't be marrying Vincent. There was no way her father would ignore the gods.

And it was Kat, Steve, and Oliver who took Eleven to the cliff.

And it was them who watched her fall, knowing it was the last time they'd ever see her.

Mike was still in disbelief that his friends were helping him with this plan.

It was stupid, haphazard, and more than likely would end in Karen ripping somebody to shreds, but it was the only plan they had. Dustin was the most vital component to said plan other than Mike himself, and the others had ensured that the rest of it would go off as smoothly as possible. Which was why Mike was now pacing in his room at his mother's house, waiting for the news from Dustin that Eleven was safe.

"Yo."

He jumped.

"Dustin!"

"You are wound tighter than a *spring*. Calm down." Dustin stretched and leaned against the wall. "Your mortal lover girl is at the spot. Completely confused, but she's there. And she's okay."

"Thank you so much. I owe you big time for this."

"Hey. I know her brother-in-law, so consider this a favor. But I *will* be collecting on that one day, so watch out."

Mike swallowed and nodded before perching on his windowsill. Night was falling fast, and there was something to be done for his future bride at their home. She had to meet him. He wasn't going to make her do anything yet; he was going to get to know her, and that was what a good husband did. He got to know his wife before he married her and he made her happy.

He arrived at the home he'd occupy with her and landed lightly, taking on his mortal form. She was inside, marveling at the splendor that he'd insisted on the place having, and he smiled.

"Hello," he greeted her. She whirled around and gasped.

"A-are you...are you the monster I'm supposed to marry?"

"Yeah. Sorry about kidnapping you. I... I've actually been watching you for a while now. You don't belong in Mirkwood."

"Because I'm supposedly so beautiful that it 'puts the goddess of love herself to shame'?" The contempt in Eleven's voice was clear.

"No. Because you're too good for it. You're beautiful, of course, but you have a certain level of grace about it. You're not telling everyone you're more beautiful than her. You're telling them to have respect for a goddess. And that's respectable."

She blinked, as if not believing for a moment that somebody admired her for something other than her beauty, then she smiled and Mike felt himself falling even farther in love with her. Her smile was quiet, demure, and so *her* and he just wanted to lock the door so nobody could take her smile away.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"I... I can't tell you. It would ruin everything. There are some very powerful people who want to keep us apart, and I'm not supposed to be here. But I *can* tell you that I love you, without a doubt in my mind."

"...you're a god, aren't you?"

Shit, she's smart.

"Yeah. Yeah, I am."

"Then it's okay. You'll tell me when the time comes and that's what makes it okay."

I don't deserve you.

El (as her fiancé had nicknamed her, insisting Eleven was a horrible name and she needed something better) was happy in her new life. Her fiancé came to see her often, even shirking his godly duties to do so. But she didn't care, because she was happier than she'd been in years and he was nothing but kind to her. He treated her like a goddess, always worried about her and her happiness. Not *once* did he ever try to make her do something she was uncomfortable with, letting her set the pace for their relationship. In all honesty, she'd never known anybody like him (except maybe Steve, but he was married to Kat and honestly not her type) and in a way, she was glad that she'd been carried off. And it didn't hurt that she'd fallen in love with him and they went much, *much* further than was deemed appropriate for betrothed couples.

And from there, their relationship only deepened. They were married in all but name, after all, and they loved each other dearly. For her, his freckles and floppy dark hair and lanky frame were all she needed to see most of the time. He liked to ask her about her life before the engagements and worship, and she'd tell him anything he wanted to know.

"What are your sisters like?" he asked her one day while they were cuddling in bed.

"I have five, you know. Kat and Kali are the ones I'm closest to. Victoria, Olivia, and Willow were always off doing their own thing."

"Hm."

"I always wanted to be close to them, but they wanted to impress Papa." Her eyes widened. "What if they came to visit me here?!"

"El... I don't think that's a good idea."

"Please?" She snuggled closer to him, her eyelashes fluttering. "I want to see them where we're not competing for Papa's attention."

"I really hate saying no to you, but... no, I can't let them visit."

"Why not?"

"You figured out I'm a god the first time we officially met. I'm worried they might... try and convince you to do something stupid, something that could ruin everything."

"Like discovering which god you are." She understood his worry.

And she remembered that the lack of closeness had been from jealousy. Not of her being Papa's favorite, but of her beauty. None of that would change. She knew that.

"Right. I love you so much, El. I want to give you the world, but until I figure out how we can be together *openly*, I can't." He kissed her jaw gently. "Please, I just need a little more time."

"Take all the time you need." The loneliness wasn't really an issue; after being surrounded by adoring crowds for so long, having just *one person* cradling her and calling her beautiful was all she needed.

Of course, that changed when she started to feel nauseous on a daily basis. Her fiancé worried over her constantly, and she had to shove him out the door to do his job so nobody would get suspicious. But he figured out what was wrong with her—she was *pregnant*. Both of them were excited to welcome the baby, and nothing could have made their lives more perfect. Except, of course, being allowed out in the open with their relationship.

So, of course, that was when the Fates made everything go to shit.

"Mike."

He looked up at the sound of Nancy's voice; she was heading back to the Underworld soon, and he was happy to see her before she went. He was getting ready to see his beautiful pregnant fiancée himself. But the look on Nancy's face had him worried.

"Nance? What's wrong?"

"That... that mortal princess you were supposed to... Mom found her."

The ichor in Mike's veins froze.

"She's heading out to take care of her, because apparently you screwed up?"

No. No no no no no.

"Shit." Mike ran for the window and Nancy grabbed his arm.

"Mike, what happened?"

"I didn't screw up. She fell in love with a monster—*me*." Nancy's eyes widened and she nodded.

"Hurry. Mom was heading out when I got here."

He leapt from the window and flew faster than he ever had in his life, hoping and praying he'd get there before his mother and in time to protect El. Because she was the love of his life, the mother of his child, and she *needed him*.

But he was too late.

By the time he got to their little hidden cabin, where he'd been going to be with her for *so long*, the place was destroyed. Blood spattered a nearby tree and his stomach dropped.

No.

"Michael."

He snapped his head up at the sound of his mother's voice, hatred burning in his eyes.

"You lied to me. You said the job was done."

"I didn't *lie*."

"Obviously, you did. That girl was *not* in love with a monster."

"She was. *I'm* the monster."

Karen's eyes flared with anger.

"You *stupid* boy. You *had* to make her love you, didn't you?"

"Yeah, by treating her with respect and dignity. Neither of which she had in Mirkwood. Where is she?"

"Hm. I'm not entirely sure."

"*Where. Is. El?*"

"Watch your tone. I'm still your mother."

"And I want my fiancée back. Where is she? I'm not asking again."

"I'm honestly not sure, Michael."

"Then how about this: is she *dead*?"

"No."

He whirled around and spread his wings, ready to go out and look for her, but he was stopped by his mother forcing him to freeze.

"Oh, no. You're grounded. *Literally*."

"Mom, I have to find her. She's... she's pregnant, and the humans look down on girls who get pregnant outside of marriage—"

"And she'll be paying for that soon enough, I promise you that. No *mere mortal* tries to usurp me as the goddess of beauty and seduces my son."

Next thing he knew, he was back in his room, his window barred to keep him from escaping and the door locked. He felt like he couldn't breathe as he collapsed on his bed for the first time in months. It was so *cold* without El.

Your feet are freezing!

Why do you think I'm putting them on you? You're warm.

His heart ached. All he wanted was her safe, and that was hopeless now.

Because of him, she was alone and pregnant in an unforgiving world.

Because of him, she was hurt, based on the blood in the rubble.

Because of him, she was going to be hunted by Karen more than ever.

The last thing that registered was his mother administering something to his eyes.

Then it was nothing but darkness.

El held her arm where it was bleeding. It didn't hurt. Not as much as losing Mike did.

Oh, now she knew who he was. That had been made clear when *Karen herself* came down and started screeching about her son's betrayal as she slashed El's arm with her long, sharp nails. She'd only found out because El made the mistake of praying to her for a healthy birth, for the health of herself and her child, and Karen had known where she was *instantly*.

She'd run, and she'd heard the little cabin being destroyed. And she'd heard Mike show up a few moments later, screaming at his mother and demanding to know where El was. And he and Karen had disappeared.

She crouched by the rubble and found what she was looking for—the necklace Mike had given her before the ring that she still wore on her finger, the necklace that represented his undying love for her. Literally, in this case, since Mike couldn't die.

But El could.

He's never going to take me back. I was so stupid.

Of course he was the god of love. Of course he only saw me because his mother wanted revenge. Of course she hates me more than ever.

Gods don't marry stupid people.

She continued to dig through the rubble, ignoring the pain in her arm. There were some more of the small trinkets Mike had brought her—things that were worthless to a god but very very valuable to humans. Things that she could use to survive. She knew that any little bit would go towards making the baby's life better than its mother's without its father.

If it weren't for the baby, she would have gone and let herself die alone, but she had another person to think about.

"Holy shit."

She looked up to see a man with curly hair looking over the rubble of her former home. He wore a hat and she recognized him, however briefly, as the one who'd brought her to Mike in the first place. Thinking over all the stories she heard, she knew he must have been Dustin—the West Wind and a close friend of Mike's. Out of fear, she bowed to him, trembling.

"Whoa, hey, I'm not here for that shit." Dustin helped her to her feet. "Are you okay? Your arm..."

"It's nothing. *She* just hates me more than ever and I'm alone again." She squeezed her eyes shut.

No tears. Don't cry.

"You can cry if you want," Dustin told her gently. "You're *allowed* to

cry in this kind of situation."

"I don't know if I can. Yesterday, everything was perfect. We were in love and happy and talking about adding a room to the house. And now everything's gone to absolute *shit*."

"I want to help you, but I can't do much more than take you back to Mirkwood."

"Not Papa. *Please*—"

"Him? He's dead."

"*Dead?*"

"God of death owed Mike a favor for setting up him and his wife, so... Mike called it in."

"Papa's dead." She didn't feel sad; she felt a sense of freeing relief.

"Your older sister, Kat—she's in charge now. Her and her husband. I'm going to take you to them and you'll be safe."

Safe.

No. El was never going to be safe again. Mike was the person—not god, not human, but *person*—who made her feel the safest, like she was more than a pretty face, like she legitimately had something to say. He was the one who held her when she cried because of a nightmare where she was still with Papa, he was the one who gave her a real home, he was the one who loved her with every fiber of his being.

Was she just going to give up?

"Where is *her* home?"

Dustin paled.

"Eleven, no, you—"

"El."

"What?"

"My name is El. That's the name Mike gave me. That's the name I'm going to keep. And I'm going to prove that I deserve to be his wife, even if it kills me. Because I'm not giving up."

"...damn. And I thought *Mike* had it bad."

"I have a time limit, though, on how long I can go."

"Why?"

"...I'm... I'm pregnant." Dustin took a deep breath and sighed.

"Fuck. This is bad."

"I'm carrying a demigod. Of course it's bad."

"No, it's more complicated than that. You're mortal."

"So? Women have demigod babies all the time."

"Yeah, but very few of them survive. There's a *reason* for that. The ones that survive? They're stronger than normal women. Or they have some godly blood further back. You don't have either of those advantages, so this baby is going to kill you when the time comes."

El staggered back a bit.

"Y-you mean...?"

"I'm sorry, El. That's why I wanted to take you to Mirkwood—so you could spend the rest of your days surrounded by your family."

"How come I didn't know...?"

"Because there aren't a lot of people who know. Even *Mike* doesn't know."

"Is there any way I could... survive?"

"Not one that you could achieve. I'm so sorry."

"...then I'll still prove myself. Maybe then she'll take pity on the baby and let Mike raise our child when I'm gone." Dustin took her hands and nodded solemnly.

"I'll tell you where she lives."

"Excuse me, ma'am."

Karen looked up to see one of her servants.

"What is it?"

"Your... your son's betrothed is here to speak with you."

"She's *not* betrothed to my son. She was just a mortal he was briefly interested in and he'll get over it."

"Well... she's here to speak with you now. Should I let her in?"

"I guess so."

She watched as the young woman entered, her belly gently swollen and looking a little worse for wear. Eleven was pretty, for a mortal, and Karen almost felt sorry for her. Almost.

You tried to replace me twice now—as a goddess and as the primary concern in my son's life.

Not on my watch.

"What do you want?" she snapped.

"I... I want to prove myself worthy of Mike."

"A little late, isn't it?"

"Please." Eleven's lip trembled. "I want to be his wife. I love him, and I can't... I can't live without him."

"Fine. You may prove yourself. Come along."

Eleven followed Karen to the kitchen, where the goddess proceeded

to dump out a few bags of grains.

"You have until sundown to sort these by type. This is your first test. Pass this and you can move on to the next one. Fail, and you leave this house forever."

"Yes." Eleven nodded. "Thank you for giving me a chance."

She knelt by the pile of grains in a way that protected her belly and Karen couldn't help but feel a small sense of admiration for this girl who was so desperate. Still, the fact stood that it was because of this girl that Michael had been shirking his duties for months, because of her that he no longer listened to his mother, and because of her that he was currently passed out in his room.

Of course, it was also because Karen had knocked him out but shush. Details.

El was suddenly grateful that her (hopefully) husband-to-be was a god with several godly friends. Those same friends wanted to see her succeed because it meant they'd see her and Mike married and Mike happier than they'd ever seen him. One of those godly friends helped her in every task that Karen assigned.

Sorting the grain? An army of ants came through and did it for her.

Retrieving the wool of the sun sheep? A set of reeds recommended she simply take some wool from a thorn-bush.

Filling a cup with water from the River of Souls? An eagle took care of that.

And now she was facing Karen, feeling like she'd proven herself more than worthy of being Mike's wife and seeing him again. But Karen didn't feel the same. Instead, she had one final task for El, now that winter had set in.

"I want you to take this box to the Underworld and get some of my eldest daughter's beauty. Bring it back here and you will have proven yourself worthy of my son."

By now, however, El was heavily pregnant. Her belly was rounder than ever; if she had to guess, she would be giving birth within a few weeks. Hardly the time to go trekking off to the Underworld. But she'd made her bed and now she had to lie in it. And prove herself before she gave birth and the baby killed her. So she set off to find a way down.

And by now, Mike had woken up and heard about what was going on from Dustin. He couldn't believe El was going so far to prove herself, but then Dustin gave him the same kicker he'd given El: that the baby would kill her when she gave birth.

"Then... why would she...?" Mike choked out.

"She told me that maybe your mother would have pity and let you raise the baby once she's gone. But... you're going to stop this, right?"

"Of course." He threw off his blankets and stomped over to his door, slamming his fists on it. "MOM!"

"Yes, darling?" she said, smiling as she appeared outside.

"Let me out. Let me see her. I... It's my last chance."

"She's busy at the moment, Michael. Trying to prove herself."

"Mom, she's going to die."

"All mortals *die*. That's not news to me."

"No—it's... please. I... I'm going to lose her. When the baby's born, she's going to die and I'm... I'm not going to be able to take it. Especially if my last memory of her is her death. Let me see her. Let me hold her one last time. Because next time I see her if I don't take this chance... it's going to be after she's died to bring our child into the world."

Karen froze.

What is he talking about?

Old memories came into her head—of mortal women, dying to bring

bastard demigods into the world. Those same demigods being outcasted by society and abandoned by their godly parents because the mortal women were nothing more than toys. The gods shrugging off the loss. None of them worrying about it because mortals and gods never *truly* fell in love with each other.

Her son was the exception.

He *actually loved* this mortal girl.

Taking a chance, Karen threw open the door.

"Go. She went to see your sister. Find her."

Mike ran, his heart pounding as his wings extended and he flew in the direction of the Underworld. He prayed that she was simply walking along, on her way to see Nancy, but the Fates once again seemed to despise him.

El was lying by the side of the road, breathing heavily and clutching her belly. Blood pooled between her legs and he instantly knew what was happening.

The baby was coming.

"El!" he yelped. She looked up and a weak smile came onto her face.

"Hi," she whispered. "I'm dying."

"Please, no, you can't—" She screamed in pain as contractions rippled through her abdomen. Panting, she made eye contact with him again.

"Take care of the baby."

"No. Stop talking. Save your strength."

"I'm dying, Mike. This baby is going to kill me."

He held her in his arms, debating on whether or not he should move her. No, he couldn't. There wasn't enough time to bring her anywhere. His heart was shattering; he was going to lose her again, this time for *good*.

"El, you can't leave me. Please, you can't. I... I need you. I don't know anything about—" She sobbed as another contraction hit, and he could feel her body shudder.

"I love you."

She screamed again and a second cry joined her in harmony. A baby was lying on the grass and Mike scooped it—*her*, they had a daughter—into his arms. Cradling her, he angled El so that she could see the baby.

"She's here," he croaked, his heart shattering into even tinier pieces. "El, you did it."

"I did." Her eyes fluttered, going to close. "She's so perfect..."

"Just like her mother. Please, stay for her."

"I can't..." He could feel the life leaving her body. "I love you both..."

"I love you, too. So much, El..."

She'd stopped breathing.

"El?"

She was gone.

"El, please, no..."

The baby in his arms squirmed and wailed, seeming to sense her father's distress. But Mike was numb.

He'd seen death before. You couldn't be a god and avoid it. His sister was the queen of the Underworld! But this was the first time he'd been close to a person who died. The first time he'd watched somebody he'd loved die. And it *sucked*. His heart had been ripped out of his chest and cast into the Underworld with El's soul. He was dead, too.

Then he remembered the baby in his arms and looked down.

His daughter—*El's daughter, more than yours*—was perfect, the image of her mother. Tiny button nose, the beginnings of brown curls on her head, large eyes... he clutched her tighter and sobbed. She was all he had left now. Screw everything else; if he couldn't have his El or their daughter, the world could die. He didn't care.

"Oh, Michael..."

His mother's voice was behind him and he shielded El and the baby from her view. Hatred for her bloomed in his veins. She didn't get to see El or the baby. She didn't have that right.

"I'm so sorry," she choked out, her voice breaking. "I... I had no idea. I thought she'd complete the task and come back to you. I didn't know... I didn't know the baby would kill her."

"Yeah, well, you don't *think*, do you?!" he snapped, his own voice filled with so much emotion. "I lost so much time with her and her time was short anyway. I loved her so much... and now she's *gone*."

"Let me see the baby."

"No. You don't have that right. She's my daughter and I'm going to take care of her. She's all that matters to me."

Karen squeezed her eyes shut.

There *was* a way they could fix things... but thankfully, Nancy wasn't the type to let her brother waste away. The goddess of love needed to go see her own daughter and hope she'd listen. Because the method was old and almost forgotten, but Karen had used it once before, to save Holly when it seemed as if her youngest was going to be born a mortal and had technically died at birth. But thanks to the method, she'd lived and become a goddess.

"Do you want El to go back to the house?" she whispered.

"Don't touch her. You've done enough damage."

"I'm not going to. I'm going to ask Dustin to bring her back to the house."

Mike took a deep breath and nodded.

"I'll bury her looking at the ocean. She... she always wanted to see it and she never got the chance."

Dustin arrived a few minutes later, but he ended up carrying the baby so Mike could hold El one last time as he carried his beloved back to the house. Karen then set off for the Underworld, not caring how many ancient laws she was breaking as she stormed past the shades of the dead and grabbed that of her now-deceased daughter-in-law (there was no other word for her) and made her way to Jonathan and Nancy's palace.

"Mom, it's not spring..." Nancy said, her voice trailing off as she noticed El's shade at Karen's side. "Who's this?"

"Let her come back as herself," Karen stated. "This is El. Your sister-in-law."

"Oh, Mike..." Nancy whispered.

"If you give her just twelve hours, we can make her a goddess. And she needs to live. Michael won't survive without her."

"We can give her the twelve hours," agreed Jonathan, nodding. "I know what it's like to be in love like that, and... I don't want Mike to do the godly equivalent of dying."

"Thank you."

Karen turned to leave with El's shade, who looked happy.

"Thank you."

"I never actually hated you," Karen told her as they walked towards the mortal realm. "I didn't want to be replaced. That was all."

"I can't replace you. You're the goddess and his mother."

Once they were out in the sunlight again, Karen carried El's soul—now an orb of pale blue light—towards the home where Mike had the girl's body.

Upon seeing him, Karen felt like she'd been stabbed through the heart (which hurt a lot more than her wrist; she had the scar to prove that one). He was cradling El's body, burying his face in her hair and crying softly.

"Michael."

He snapped his head up and gave her a look of confusion.

"Go get some nectar and ambrosia. We're going to bring her back."

As if to prove it, she gently handed El's soul to her son, who laid El's head down and cradled the blue orb just as gently. A smile—something she hadn't seen from him in *months*—spread across his face. Dustin came out holding the baby girl, now wrapped in a wool blanket and asleep.

Instead of making Mike get the ingredients, though, Karen retrieved them herself. As carefully as she had with her own daughter, she combined them with El's soul and it turned from blue to golden.

"Press it to her heart," she told Mike. He nodded and did so, and El's color changed. She glowed with the faint gold shimmer of the gods, and then she sucked in a single breath.

She's alive!

Her eyes fluttered open and rested on Mike.

"M-Mike...?"

"El." He hugged her tightly, not seeming to quite believe that she was back. "Please be real."

"I'm real. What's..." Her voice trailed off as Dustin walked over, cradling her baby. "Oh... is that..."

"Our daughter." The West Wind placed the infant in her mother's arms and she smiled.

"Well, best be going to share the news," Dustin announced, bowing. "I will see you all later."

Karen nodded and watched her son and her daughter-in-law interact with their baby. Mike's hands didn't leave El's body for a second, as if she'd vanish if he stopped touching her. But Karen no longer felt like she was being replaced—rather, her family was growing, and that was what mattered.

And this little family of three, well... she'd gladly accept it.

Mike, the god of love.

El, the goddess of the soul.

And their daughter, Melody, the goddess of music.

It was a true family of legend.

That was the honest truth.

Okay, so I know you all hated that part where El died, but technically, that's actually in the original story.

Speaking of which, this is based off the story of Eros and Psyche. Look it up; it's a lot less tragic than this and the solution is a lot more contrived. Like, Eros just CASUALLY reverses death, no biggie. Anyway, yeah, I'm uncreative, sue me.

So long and thanks for all the fish.